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JEVONS BLOCK

BY

KATE BUSS

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JEVONS BLOCK

A BOOK OF SEX ENMITY

BY

KATE BUSS



BOSTON

McGRATH-SHERRILL PRESS

NINETEEN SEVENTEEN

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*Thanks are due to the editors of
Others, The Poetry Review, and The Boston Transcript
for their permission to reprint certain of the
poems included in this volume.*

To Arabelle and Arthrite Bacon,
To Ivan and Elise,
To a man who sees the substance
In mirrors,
I am indebted
For the truth of Jevons Block.

Jevons Block

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PROLOGUE BY THE ELEVATOR BOY



You see me as the elevator boy,
But the actuality of my position is ephemeral ;
In a year I shall receive a degree in medicine
And go.
Meanwhile I study the colossal symbol of a human being
In this pile of masonry
That sanctions the ugly
In ornament, in smiles, in sex.
I hear a human anger in my signal bell.
The shaft down which the elevator slides
Is the spine to keep the system together ;
And the corridors are nerves that link each room
As heart and brain that strive in secret.
Am I responsible to have said it?
Or responsible only so far as I have seen the scheme unfairly ?
Abnormal and abortive matter
Tighten the leash on truth.
To deceive is to establish an enemy —
Which brings me to the theme
That scars and shadows Jevons Block.

PROLOGUE BY THE ELEVATOR BOY, *continued*



It is the subconscious enmity
Of the men and women in it.
You may hear it in the labored breathing,
See it in the eyes that seek for salvage
As hawkers swoop and seize in isolation.
If sex were meant to be an inhibition,
Would God have planned it in dependent atoms ?
The poet speaks as though it were a cloak
To smarten the circumstance of living—
Poor old flabby Bacon—
Miss Ruth's too young to know beyond solicitation—
Some never see the enmity of sexes,
Having minds that sift no ash—
But Anabelle is scarred and states the reason,
And Draemer says a woman is the open door to boredom.
In each
The over-sense of sex
Idles the libido to sterile purpose
And motivates in Jevons Block
To evade responsibility.



Arabelle

ARABELLE

Perfumes and Cosmetics



I dislike men,
Dislike them for the strain
They put on women.
If I didn't have to earn a living
I'd snap my fingers at this fading hair of mine
And let the colour in my cheeks
Begin to go.
I'd sit down to it
And rock my age in comfort by the fire.
Forty-seven and poor —
If you're single —
Is the devil of a combination for a woman.
Every time a married one
Comes in to buy a box of rouge
I'd like to tell her she's a fool to do it
When she's not obliged to look young.
Once I said as much
And the woman answered
"I guess you're not married
Or you'd know the reason". . .
I dislike men
For the strain they put on women.



ArThrite Bacon

ARTHRITE BACON

Poetry Bookshop



I married a famous palmist
In Leipzig —
Joined myself to one
Who had imagination but no rhythm in her soul —
To gain a home
Long since dissolved by extravagance and death.
It was my desire to live well;
In Paris if I might choose
Where poets are not so much the fashion
As the feeders of a lyric nation.
The Alexandrine was my metre,
None it seems care about that in this country.
And not to starve I stilled my song
To vend the songs of other poets
Whose vocation is but avocation now with me.
Fate has not been friend to me.
Could I have loved like Rupert Brooke
Or lived like Amy Lowell
I ask you fairly to decide
If I'd be urging you to buy their books
Instead of selling my own?



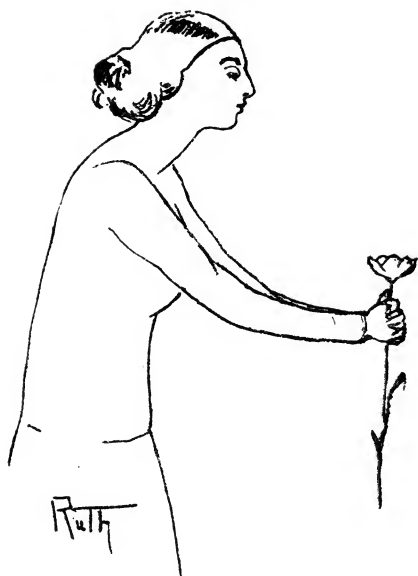
Raphael Lenski

RAPHAEL LENSKI

Osteopath



What would Buonarotti say
Who worshipped Vittoria
And the sparse line of the Sistine Chapel
If he could see the bulk of crepe kimono
I must model with.
Great thighs and sagging breasts,
Muscles I can never tighten
'Though I punch and pound and stretch
Until some women shriek to stay me,
But they always come again
In supine endeavor to get thin.
Sometimes one imagines I love her!
Lord! They make me sick,
These women yearning for a new sensation.
Do they think that I would touch them
If I were not paid to do it.
Master, listen!
My lovely lady's shrined next door.

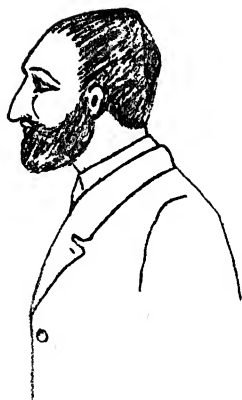


RUTH

Flower Shop



Days when trade is dull
I dream of flowers that do not grow in dozens
Wired for a funeral or a fête.
Somewhere
I imagine meadows swaying
With whatever colour they may be,
Ten thousand thousand blossoms
Free their hearts
To a robin or a chick-a-dee.
And I may pull them for everyone's possession.
Companion all the city children,
To old ladies send surprise bouquets,
Pin a flower on my lover's jacket
Every noon at one.
And if the sun is over-hot with shining
And the night is late to come,
It is no matter.
There'll be just as many more
Tomorrow morning
Fresh to feel the sun.



Artkel Aronian

ARKEL ARONIAN

Rugs Woven and Repaired



Weaving rugs to please a rich man
Weaving luck for me,
Rich man, poor man,
Waiting for a rug to finish
Fortunes to compare!
White's for luck in red Bokhara,
Red of warp and woof to wear.
White to sign a compact with the Devil
Shunting off all evil
From my son.
Red of thread to savour him
White to spare —
Pearls to play with
And to ask a prayer —
Sleep my son in God's securest silence.
Thy father'll not have done
The red Bokhara
'Til the spring and thou
Are come.

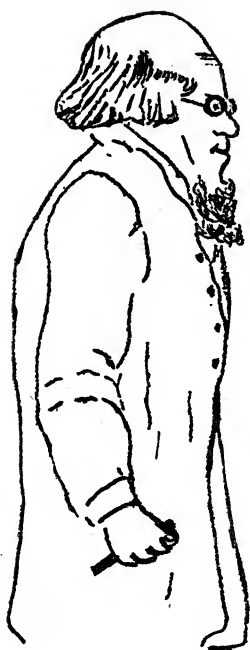


DR. DEVINE

Physician



Today
I am surfeited with women
Their streaked faces bore me.
Whys
Listened to before,
Eyes,
Wet and bent to implore,
Ask for quarter —
Weak to meet a ghost
When strong they went to seek it —
I do not share in their delight,
Why must they shamble at my door
With secret bills and moist supplication
To bribe me to break the law?
I do and I may,
But for today
I shall leave these painful ladies
To palliate their sins to someone else
Who'll chance their wage.



Simon Weaver

SIMON WEAVER

Bric-a-brac Repaired



My neighbor is closeted
All day
With lovely ladies,
They hold his hands and weep.
If one should smile at me
I would wipe away her tears
With my apron,
And join together
The broken wings of her grief.
I will ask my neighbor
To bring me a lovely lady
To mend. . . .
He is walking down the street
Swinging a stick



Elise

ELISE

Coiffeuse



Yes! I know Madame
She asked for me
And she's a millionaire
But I hate her smell.
You said yourself the last time she was in
'Twas like a polecat —
An' she's got sunken tubs to every chamber,
I heard her tell it —
A facial! And curl her hair!
Gawd!
The thermometer's a hundred.
You say
If I don't do it I can go!
Where'd I go in August?. . .
No I wouldn't,
That's where you get off.
This way Mrs. Smith
There's a breeze that's blowing by this window.
Let me have your hat,
Sailors are so smart with linen suits.



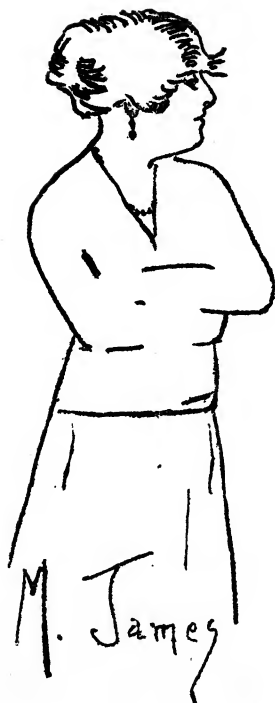
Michael Elder.—

MICHAEL ELDER

Hats Reblocked



I've worked on hats since I was seventeen
And now I'm close to seventy.
Straw for tulip and the caring weather,
Felt for winter —
Fits more firmly on old men's hair —
Wide brim narrowed by a quarter inch
(Shows as though 'twas on your nose to some)
Ribbon freshed and curve pressed straight.
Once I used to ponder
Why a hat should need reshaping
Just the time some man had formed it
To a firm and fellowed feeling
By a few months wear.
I have learned
Through feeling bands that sweat to fit a brow,
That men with brains inside their heads
Wear their hats the longest.

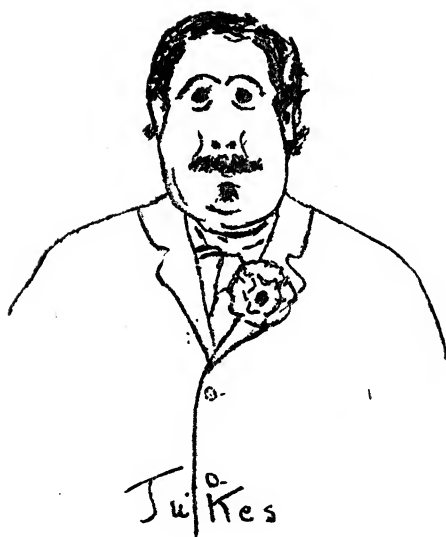


M. JAMES

Manicure



I have known hands all my life.
It is my bread to tint an ageing palm
That scants its tip for rosaline
And the careful removal of dry flesh.
Butter for my bread
I buy from fingers that make light with mine
And slide a dollar in between to make it right.
Hands are mostly all alike
Thinking through their fingertips
Of bargaining and lust.
But his are different,
Lean and unconcerned with me,
Even when lying idle in soapy water.
Just to feel his fingers for five minutes
I'd perfume them, without money,
To philander at another breast than mine.
But some day —
Before I'm faded with the wanting —
I shall do his nails in the farther room
And take the pay for waiting
There.
Little enough it will be
But long cherishing quick spent.



JUKES

Appraiser



All life's for shrewd appraising.
Fools and dreamers take a turn at telling values
And philosophers have tried it.
Some measure men by bed and book
That all the world may see to look —
The fools are these.
And some will regulate the count
By what they are themselves —
These are dreamers.
Household sticks aren't much to price a life
That's furnished by secrets and long sittings;
Nor much to make a living by perhaps you'll think,
But that's the humor in the plan
Though few will laugh to feel it.
Grotesques —
In low or high relief —
We fill the earth's entablature
With ashlar or with clay,
And form its decoration. . . .
When I tiptoe through empty dwellings
And see in dusty mirrors
Doubts and potent failures
That grimace in over-ponderous flesh
I am too terrified to laugh.
These the Great Appraiser will inspect
When I have left my human house untenanted.



LÉANDRE

Sample Shoes



Staccato women
Wear out paid for leather
Seeking newer shoes.
Foolish shoppers
With their busy quests and baffled eyes.
Sometimes one is sorry for me
Selling.
There is recompense for every service.
And all the day
Through which my long reflective fingers
Feel the urge beneath the silk
I am content to linger
At your unshod feet.



Célestine Dérème

CELÉSTE DÉRÈME

Corsetière



Nietzsche says
Woman has cause for shame
If she unlearns her art of charming.
But he had no more transparent plane
From which to analyze the world
Than I who corset idle women
And stand to labour to their conversation.
Tiens! Aphrodite is long dead
And her progeny are become asexual marionettes
To dance and not pay.
Some women aid slackened muscles
With steel and satin stripes,
Some buy stiffened nainsook
To shape their barrenness,
And mirrors flatter the deception.
Yesterday I measured a fevered creature
To suckle a child
And she completes the metaphor.
Clothed in renascent flesh
A mirror seemed the last place that she cared to look.
When I rejoiced to see comeliness
Arrows pointed in her eyes.
She was too deceived by fantasie
To divine her glory.



IVAN KARENINE

Dancing Master



One step — two step —

Pardon if I use a pressure

My arm dictates the measure, Madame.

Listen

You who wonder why I dance no longer

At the court in Russia.

War's the reason —

I must fight or live elsewhere —

War has naught to do with dancing.

War is murder! Mars its wanton father. . . .

Sometimes Earth brings forth a bastard.

On a silver night she smiles to say

"This son of mine I do not breed to fight"

I was born within this Mother-rhythm

Of listening feet and low and lissome laughter

Where ecstasy is breath and measure to the senses,

And I can never be a citizen of slaughter.

But Mars has sought to snare my feet with battle anthem

And all the day inside my alien head

The rage that sped me here

Shrieks to follow after.

One step — two step —

Rhythmed like marching soldiers,

Swells to martial music

In a language spiked with swords.



WHILEMINA WINTER

Smart Shop



Once I dreamed
My mission was to make the world good looking,
The women I mean —
The world is round for men and slopes their way
But women need to harbour youth to stay —
I'm not for suffrage, as you may think from what I say.
But I don't need to ask a favor,
And my hair has kept its russet fret and fleck
(I'm quoting now about my hair)
However, *revenons à nos moutons* as the Frenchmen say.
I bought this shop from a girl who wished to marry,
Planned to dress no two the same
But show to each her own attainment
With clothes objectively designed.
Before a year was up I saw I'd never make a living
Forcing personalities.
Then I figured what it is that Eve is really wanting
And discovered — what no male has ever doubted —
That every woman dressed to please some man,
And few men notice what their women wear
If the price is right.
Now I dress them all alike
And they are better pleased to look like some one else
And I can pay my bills.

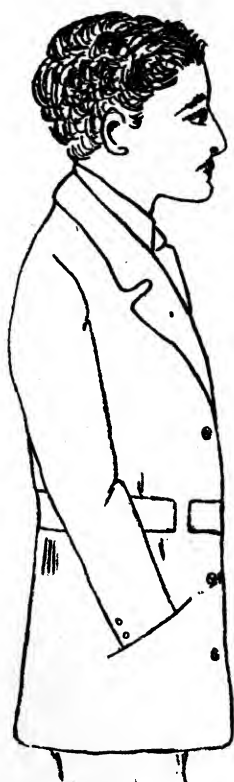


SIDNEY FALK

Drugs



Miss Winter's just been in
To drink her malted milk.
She buys no other stuff of me —
No boxes with their value in the label —
And I don't believe she trades with Anabelle.
She says that all a woman needs is work
To keep her circulation up.
Miss Winter's something of a joker,
Insists that husbands are like drugs
A narcotic to the nervous system.
She says she dreams of life
In terms of dresses
Just as I with drugs.
I wish she didn't feel so strong for clothing strangers —
But it's great to hear her say
Deception, respite, dreams, and courage
Find in each of us a sharer.
And I can wait 'til she is over-tired
To alchemize her views with mine.



Paul Graeme

PAUL DRAEMER

Photographer



Women bore me.
Tenderly they say
"Make me beautiful"
And then lament
If I let a wrinkle stay.
They can't see that lines are lovely,
That life, not youth, is gay,
Or they'd abjure the struggle
For the adolescent surface
Of unworked clay.
Women bore me by too little knowledge
Every day. . .
Always they are thinking
Men are keen to legalize a look
Or coax them to loiter on the way.
Why can't they sometimes take for granted
We may wish to look away.



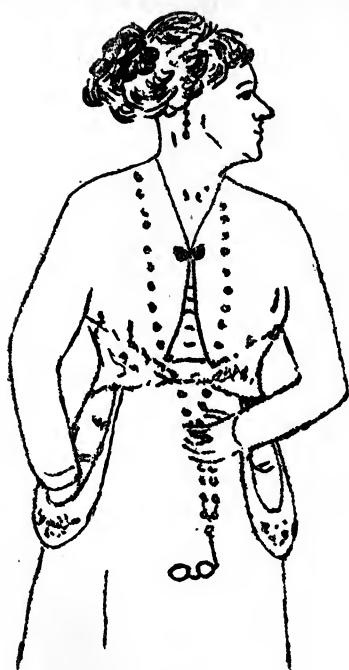
A. Bly

A. BLY

Taxidermist



I was once a surgeon
With the gospel for knife —
What sin begat I endeavored to destroy —
But there's a strange psychology in sinning,
Men pay to seek it
Who will not spend a cent to put it away.
To say my practice brought no supper to my table
Is neither to disprove the existence of sin
Nor keep vigil against.
Now I scrape the skins of animals
To live.
Salt for their hides is best.
Somberly
A Javanese monkey sits on a shelf
And obscenely chatters when I edge my tools,
But I shall not skin him yet
He brings trade from our brothers.



Mrs Smith-Reeder.

MRS. SMITH-REEDER

Tea Room Manager



Old women
Nod *bien coiffé* heads
Over Orange Pekoe
And the bitter green
Of English breakfast brew.
Young girls come in
To gaze at men
And bewilder with their bodies.
It is not tea they drink —
Tea is a sophisticated taste.
Only old women know this.



Horatio Hinklemitt.

HORATIO HINKLEMITT

Entertainment Bureau



The Bible says
"Be not forgetful to entertain strangers."
No doubt you are surprised to learn
I read The Book,
But if I didn't seek a smile
In Solomon
Or that old stoic Epictetus
I couldn't swing this entertainment business
In which the humor's more apparent
On the stage than in the office.
It's the laugh between us —
Of that I'm not forgetful —
That entertains the stranger.





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